Psychology and Fairytales

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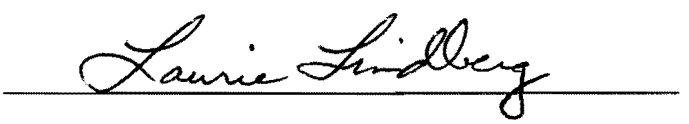

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Abstract

Fairytales have been popular children's stories for generations, but they are more than just entertaining tales. This thesis explores the use of psychology in fairytales as an aid in child development, as well as the use of fairytales as therapeutic tools in psychology. As fairytales have also been investigated by many other disciplines, the paper briefly discusses fairytale use in the areas of feminism, education, and spirituality. Finally, the paper concludes with the author's interpretation of the fairytale "The Young Slave" using ideas mentioned throughout the thesis, as well as the author's unique perspectives.

Acknowledgments

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I also want to thank my parents. They always believe in me even when I do not believe in myself. Without their support I would not have made it to where I am today.

Psychology and Fairytales

Most people can easily name a favorite fairytale from childhood. Fairytales are commonly read to children as bedtime stories, and are often among the first stories they learn to read on their own. Fairytales entertain with magic, castles, royalty, and *happily ever afters*. It is easy to see why they are so widely loved. When I was a child, my parents would read to my sister and me from a very old fairytale book before bedtime.

Fairytales, however, are more than just stories meant to entertain children. They are engrained in our society. The movie *I, Robot* is one example of a movie made for adults which uses a fairytale as part of its plot ("Hansel and Gretel"). Also, a number of books which put a spin on traditional tales have been written for adults. One good example of this is the *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* series written by James Finn Garner which uses humor to retell many of the classic fairytales.

One group of people particularly interested in fairytales has been psychologists. There is quite a bit of psychology used in fairytales which helps children's development, and fairytales are frequently used as tools of therapy in psychology. I will focus a large portion of this paper on psychology and fairytales; however, psychology is not the only subject area using and discussing fairytales. I will first briefly discuss a few other disciplines and some of their perspectives on and use of fairytales.

Diverse Opinions and Use of Fairytale

Feminists and fairytales. The goal of the feminist movement is economic, social, and political equality of men and women. What does this have to do with fairytales?

Most of the fairytales popularized by the Grimm brothers show passive women who need men (usually a prince) to come to their rescue (Blackwell, 1987). Examples of these passive heroines are Cinderella, Snow White, and Little Red Riding Hood. Many feminists feel that fairytales perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes which place women in subordinate roles, such as helpless, dependent women and subservient housewives (Segel, 1983).

It may strike some true fairytale enthusiasts that there are a number of fairytales in which a woman, as the main character, is able to take care of herself. Segel (1983) points out, however, that the most popularized fairytales, those most commonly read by or to children, are of the first sort. She uses as examples the fairytales that have been made into movies by the Disney Corporation (i.e. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty,* etc.) which display the female character as dependent on a prince to come to her rescue (Segel, 1983). Snow White, for instance, falls for her stepmother's tricks time after time, and is only able to escape the death sentence her stepmother has placed on her when the prince takes her away. She also has seven men, little though they are, who protect her. It is only while they are away that she succumbs to her stepmother's tricks.

Blackwell (1987) discusses the fact that the Grimm brothers' collections of tales came mainly from oral tradition which was passed on through generations of women. She points out that the original edition of the Grimm Brothers' book had a number of tales with strong leading women. Most of these types of stories were removed in later editions mainly to suit patriarchal societal norms (Blackwell, 1987).

I had never really considered how many of the popular fairytales portrayed women as helpless. It struck me during my research that I was ignoring how all of the women who speak out or hold power in these tales are portrayed as evil. Blackwell (1987) states, "When the mother or grandmother transmits to a young girl the moral of submissive femininity and sacrifice, youth, and beauty, when she tells her that physical unattractiveness, activity, age, and speaking out are punished, the child learns dominant gender roles of society" (p. 165).

There is a part of me that would like to argue that young girls are not learning this. I would like to be able to say that girls do not see the punishment of the witch or wicked stepmother as a punishment of speaking one's mind or holding power, but I can not. When I was younger my girl friends and I played *Cinderella* and other games where we were damsels in distress waiting for our princes to come and rescue us. None of us ever wanted to have to be the stepmother because she was ugly, old, and mean.

Corn (1995), in his article "Old Wives, Fairy Godmothers," discusses Marina Warner, a cultural critic who feels that fairytales may be dangerous as they portray negative models of female behavior. Warner suggests, as do many feminists, that the answer is to write tales from a feminist perspective, showing more women taking care of themselves (Corn, 1995). One woman who did just that is Louisa May Alcott in such books as *Behind a Mask*, which relies heavily on the tale *Beauty and the Beast*. One thing that makes Alcott's story more feminist is that the lead character, Jean Muir, looks out for number one, which is typically a male attribute (Butterworth- McDermott, 2004).

In my opinion, it might do young girls some good to hear stories in which women stand up for themselves and do not rely so heavily on men. Bronwyn Davies, a writer on

gender equality and education, believes that children may not fully understand feminist fairytales, and that it would be better to teach children to see the inequalities in the original stories (Yeoman, 1999). This has of course been argued by other feminists who want to throw the old tales out completely.

Education. As mentioned previously, fairytales are often some of the first stories children are able to read on their own. There are many picture-book versions of these tales with fewer and easier to read words, which are often available in classrooms for children to practice reading. This, however, is not the only way in which fairytales are used in educational settings.

One simple way fairytales are used in a classroom setting is to inspire creativity. *Early Childhood Today* (2001) suggests reading kindergarten or first grade children several stories and then asking them to build (using art supplies) the types of houses they believe the characters live in. The article then suggests that the teacher pose different questions to make them think and be even more creative (*Early Childhood Today, 2001).* For example, what if a character from one story came to visit a character from another story? What might the house need to be like then?

Fairytales are also being used to teach creative problem-solving to elementary school children. Children are read all or part of a fairytale and then asked to help the characters solve a problem. For instance, a teacher might read her students "Cinderella" and then ask how Cinderella could have gotten to the ball without her fairy godmother. Children practice these problem-solving skills, and can then apply them to real life situations (Flack, 1998).

In all levels of education, from elementary through college, fairytales can be used as metaphors to help students better understand the material they are learning. Chavkin (2003), for instance, uses the idea from the story "Rumpelstiltskin" of spinning straw into gold as to help explain the process of turning law students into lawyers. I believe this works because, as I mentioned earlier, most people can remember their favorite fairytales from childhood. Fairytales are so widespread that even many visiting foreign students know stories similar to the versions told in the United States. Almost everyone can relate to fairytales, which is why using them as metaphors can be very helpful.

Spiritual views. *The Witch Must Die* by Sheldon Cashdan (1999) is an excellent book based on Cashdan's theory that fairytales (or at least many of the most popular) can be separated into groups representing the seven deadly sins. As Cashdan is a psychologist, he believes that fairytales help children work through these sins in a safe and healthy way.

I have to say Cashdan's book was very enjoyable. I did feel, however, that he had to really stretch in some places to make a few of the tales fit into the sins, such as the placement of "Hansel and Gretel" under the sin of gluttony. A large portion of the book is simply his opinion, though, so I can not judge it too harshly. It is definitely an interesting view I never would have considered on my own.

Another interesting book that I would classify within this spiritual area is *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales* by Heuscher (1974). Though it is titled as a psychiatric study, it delves much more into spirituality. Heuscher often explains his ideas based on people's inner spiritual being versus the materialistic outer world. He seems to

use these terms instead of unconscious versus conscious, psychological terms, as well as showing a far more religious undertone than most psychologists. He also compares fairytales to dreams and hallucinations because he, as do many psychologists, feels that fairytales help us see our world in a new way (Heuscher, 1974). Heuscher spends most of his time in the book analyzing different fairytales from this spiritual/psychiatric opinion.

Psychology and Fairytales

Within the realm of psychology, it has generally been psychoanalysts who have shown major interest in fairytales. Sigmund Freud was the father of psychoanalytic thinking; however, most of the psychologists who have written about fairytales consider themselves students of another psychoanalyst, Carl Jung. Jung's theories differed from Freud's in that Jung did not feel everything within the personality stemmed from sexual drives. He did, however, agree with the ideas of the id, ego, and superego, the three components of the personality, according to psychologists. Jung, as Von Franz (1975) points out, also believed in a collective unconscious, which refers to a more or less universally shared unconscious knowledge. This, Jung believed, is why fairytales are so universal, and why distant parts of the world have such similar fairytales (Von Franz, 1975).

The psychology of fairytales. Although fairytales are not just children's stories, the psychological meaning within them is normally most appropriate for children. Fairytales give children an outlet for, as well as a way to work through, many of the

unconscious drives that cause dilemmas in their lives. This is important because bottling up these urges, many of which are negative, can cause psychological illness. If a child is given a safe way to work through these issues, they can be dealt with in a positive manner, and often times learned from (Bettelheim, 1976).

Fairytales, to put it simply, teach children that they will have to face hardships in life, but that by never giving up they will succeed in the end. Fairytales do this by simplifying all situations. Characters are generally shown as all good or all bad; there is very little ambiguity. Young children do not possess the ability to comprehend characters who have both good and bad traits (Bettelheim, 1976).

It is also easier for children to relate to simple characters. For this reason, the hero in fairytales tends to be a very simple character, whereas evil characters tend to be more complex. Children usually identify with the hero, according to Bettelheim (1976), because the hero is straightforward, and not just because the hero tends to do the right thing. By having characters developed in this manner, fairytales also teach children the important lesson that not everyone in the real world is a good person. There are a lot of bad people out there, too (Bettelheim, 1976).

I feel this is an important lesson to teach children. Too many parents today want to shelter their children from the bad things that go on in the real world. Someday those children will be living in that real world, and, in my opinion, those children will be rather disillusioned. The world can be a scary place if one is not prepared, and by not introducing children to this reality it puts them at a major disadvantage.

Bettelheim also points out that children have a need to see their mothers as all good. When a child's mother does something such as yell at or belittle the child, the

actions conflict with this need. The child does not want to believe that the mother who is supposed to love her may not be the perfectly nice person she had thought. Fairytales address this need through the all good/all bad portrayal of characters. Fairytales split the mother into more than one person. Many fairytales include a wicked stepmother and a fairy godmother or kindly grandmother of some sort. By doing this, the fairytale maintains the child's vision of a loving, nurturing mother-figure, while creating a second character for the mean and evil side of the mother (Bettelheim, 1976).

Bettelheim (1976) cites a real life situation in which a young girl used this exact idea. For several years of childhood the young girl imagined that her mother had been replaced by a Martian whenever her mother scolded her. This lasted only as long as the girl was too young to accept or understand that her mother was still the same generally nice person who loved her very much even if she had to discipline her occasionally (Bettelheim, 1976).

Fairytales help children do the same thing with themselves. As mentioned before, a child's unconscious holds many dark drives, which a child may not understand. Jungians believe that these negative drives (often referred to as the shadow) conflict with the obedient, friendly, and moral person the child feels he should be. As they do by making multiple characters for the mother, fairytales often contain a hero and a shadow character. The shadow character is usually an almost mirror image of the hero, except evil. This allows the child to deal with and accept his own shadow without feeling himself an evil person (Von Franz, 1975). An example of one such story is "Prince Ring." By relating different parts of his own personality to different characters, a child can begin to sort them out and understand himself (Bettelheim, 1976).

Bettelheim (1976) suggests that fairytales can also teach children about the reality principle (real life is not all fun and games) versus the pleasure principle (the idea that if something feels good, do it). He uses as an example the story "The Three Little Pigs" in which two of the pigs hastily build shabby houses in order to have more time to play. The third pig spends a great deal of time and thought building a good strong house, and misses out on a great deal of fun. A wolf comes along and easily destroys the first two houses, devouring their inhabitants. When he gets to the third house, he is unable to demolish it, ends up falling down the chimney into a cooking pot, and is eaten by the third pig (Bettelheim, 1976). According to Bettelheim (1976), this teaches the child that hard work and intelligence lead to a truly happy life. In other words, reality wins out over pleasure. In addition to this lesson, Bettelheim (1976) states that the child relates negative aspects of himself to the wolf and learns that these attributes can be overcome using intelligence and by working hard.

Hard work is not the only thing that pays off in fairytales. Many times it is the small achievements in these stories that are greatly rewarded, such as the simpleton son bringing home the finest rug in "The Three Feathers." Children learn that even small accomplishments are to be celebrated, and are a step toward independence (Bettelheim, 1976).

Gaining independence is another challenge of childhood addressed in fairytales. A large portion of fairytales begin with the parents dying, abandoning their children, or sending their children out into the world alone. These stories address a child's anxiety about being on her own away from the parents. The tales lead through adventures which in the end show the child she can make it on her own (Bettelheim, 1976). Such is the

case in "Hansel and Gretel," in which the two children are abandoned in the woods but manage to overcome a witch to return safely home.

These types of independence stories can also help young boys develop through the oedipal stage. Often the hero in these stories must slay a beast or overcome some great obstacle to win a princess. Bettelheim (1976) believes the beast or obstacle may represent the father and the princess the mother. He always says, however, that boys learn through these stories that they will grow up to be great men like their fathers, but do not actually have to compete with their fathers (Bettelheim, 1976).

For girls, these types of stories do not help with the oedipal stage. Girls, although wanting their mothers out of the picture so that they can have their fathers all to themselves, also have a strong need for their mothers' love. This situation can be addressed by the same type of fairytale that splits the mother into good and evil characters in order to preserve the all good mother ideal. The young girl can overcome the wicked stepmother while still being loved unconditionally by a fairy godmother, as in "Cinderella" (Bettelheim, 1976).

This is the area I most disagree with Bettelheim and other psychoanalysts on. I do not believe in the oedipal complex. I also do not believe that children see slaying a dragon or a stepmother as destroying the same-sex parent in order to be with the opposite-sex parent. This is one of the few areas concerned with sex-drives where Bettelheim still agrees (at least for the most part) with Freud, and in my opinion Freud was sex crazed. The majority of his theories centered around sexuality, especially that of very young children. Freud attributed almost all psychological disorders to sexual

frustration of one kind or another. I tend to disagree with the majority of Freud's theories except his ideas on the id, ego, and superego.

I previously mentioned the id, ego, and superego, which are the three main components, according to psychoanalysts, of the personality. Bettelheim (1976) feels that the recurring motif of the number three in fairytales refers to these three parts. There are frequently three siblings in fairytales. He believes that when the hero is called dumb or a simpleton it represents the state of the young child's ego when dealing with the struggle between her inner drives and the outside world. At least one of the other siblings is often transformed into an animal of some sort, which represents the id (in psychology referred to as our animalistic drives) expressing itself uncontrolled. The hero of the story then tames the wild beast, and it returns to its human form (Bettelheim, 1976). The siblings are then reunited, which Bettelheim (1976) says represents the three parts becoming the child's unified personality. Such is the case in the story "Brother and Sister."

I could not help but wonder while reading all of the books and articles that I did during my research if children really understand all of this. I found it hard to believe that children could get all of this out of a story when most adults cannot do it. Bettelheim (1976) states that children do not understand what the fairytale is doing for them psychologically, but it still does it. In my opinion, that is all that really matters.

I originally planned to delve into the meanings of the symbolism within fairytales, but that would have been quite difficult. There are many psychologists with opinions on what is or is not symbolism in these stories, and their opinions also differ on what the symbols represent. Similar to dream analysis in a psychotherapy session, much of what

the symbolism may mean comes from personal interpretation. Von Franz (1975) says that according to many critics of Jungian psychologists, ". . . psychological interpretation is only reading something into it which is not in it" (p. 26). Based on what I have learned, I will attempt a brief interpretation of my own later in this paper. Of course, my interpretation will be based on my unique perpectives.

Fairytales as a tool in psychology. Psychologists use fairytales in many different ways to aid in the therapy process. Ucko (1991) implemented the use of fairytales into group counseling session for abused women in a women's shelter. Women in abusive relationships will often blame themselves or make excuses for their spouses' actions. The majority of women who leave an abusive partner will go back unless they receive successful counseling (Ucko, 1991). Many fairytales contain storylines in which women are roughed-up, put-down, or beaten by their husbands, fathers, brothers, or boyfriends. Ucko (1991) trained counselors to use these stories in therapy sessions. Fairytales with these storylines were read to abused women, and then the women were asked what some alternatives for the woman in the story would be. The women were also asked such things as if they thought the story woman should leave her partner, or if they thought the story woman was to blame for the abuse (Ucko, 1991).

The participating therapists believed that the fairytales helped the women see their own situations in a new way. Several of the counselors reported hearing the women discussing the fairytales outside of the counseling sessions (Ucko, 1991). If this is truly found to be successful, I believe it should be implemented in women's shelters across the country.

Employing much the same idea of reading a fairytale in a group session, Edward Scott (1998) began using fairytales in counseling alcoholic inmates at a prison. He used much the same process as Ucko, reading all or part of a story and then opening the floor for responses. He also asked questions to dig deeper into what the men were thinking. He found some success in getting the men to open up, and many of them felt it was very helpful (Scott, 1998). Taking it one step further, Scott (1998) then asked his inmates to write a fairytale of their own. All who were asked to did with one exception, an illiterate man who presented his tale orally. The men expressed their deepest feelings through the characters in their fairytales. Most of them expressed some release at having written these covert confessions of what they were truly going through (Scott, 1998).

Another way fairytales are used in therapy is in dream analysis. Freud and Jung both related fairytales and dreams. Dieckman (1986) noted that many of his clients were having dreams which paralleled the motifs in the clients' favorite fairytales from childhood. He would then use the fairytale in therapy with the client. He found that there were actually parallels between events in some of the clients' real lives and the lives of the characters in the fairytales. By sorting out with the client what it was about the fairytale that made him or her cling to it, he was able to help many of them deal with the psychological disturbances that had brought them to see him in the first place (Dieckman, 1986).

These are only a few examples of the ways in which fairytales are used in bibliotherapy. I am sure there are numerous other psychologists and counselors using fairytales in their session that simply have not written books or articles. I have several

years before I will have a degree that will allow me to do therapy myself, but I already plan to use fairytales if I feel they will be helpful to my clients.

"The Young Slave"

After reading many different interpretations and analyses of fairytales, I thought it might be interesting to do one myself. I think it is important to keep in mind when reading this analysis that I am only a bachelor's level psychology graduate. I do not have the in-depth knowledge or training of a masters or doctoral level psychologist. Undergraduate psychology students do not get as detailed an education in the psychoanalytic perspective as they used to, either. It is also important to remember that, as I mentioned earlier, analyses of fairytales, much like dream analyses, are personal interpretation. What I see in the tale others may not. It is up to every reader to interpret fairytales for themselves. On that note, the tale I have selected is "The Young Slave" written by Giambattista Basile.

The story begins with a Baron's unmarried sister, named Lilla, playing with a group of girls in a garden. The girls find a beautifully blooming rose and have a contest to see who can jump over it without disturbing it. Everyone touches it except the Baron's sister, though she does knock one leaf off which she swallows in order to win the contest. Three days later she realizes she is pregnant and is fearful because she has never been with a man. She goes to a group of fairies who tell her it is from the rose leaf and help her to conceal the pregnancy. The baby (named Lisa) is sent to live with the fairies upon her birth, all of whom bestow a charm upon her. The last fairy, after twisting her foot on the way to see the baby, bestows a curse on her. The curse states that at the age of seven

her mother will leave a comb in her hair which will become stuck in her skull and kill her.

When Lisa is seven, the curse is fulfilled. Lilla has her dead daughter encased in seven crystal coffins, one inside another, and locked away in a remote room of the palace. Lilla then dies of heartache, leaving the keys to the locked room in the charge of her brother, after making her brother promise to stay out of the room. The Baron marries, and one day must leave for a hunting trip leaving the palace in the care of his wife. He tells her to stay out of the locked room. Jealousy and curiosity overcome her and she goes into the room. She opens the caskets and pulls the beautiful, and now teenage, Lisa out, dislodging the comb and awakening the girl. The wife cuts off Lisa's hair, beats her, and dresses her in rags. When the Baron returns, the wife tells him that Lisa is a slave sent to her by her aunt.

One day the Baron is to go a fair and offers to bring all the people (even the animals) of the palace whatever they want, including Lisa. She asks for a doll, a knife, and a pumice stone. When she receives these gifts, Lisa weeps and tells the doll her entire story, threatening to kill herself if the doll does not answer. The doll does answer, and Lisa continues to tell and retell her pitiful story to the doll. One day the Baron overhears the story and rescues Lisa, sending her to stay with relatives until she has gained back strength. Once she has, he brings her home to a big banquet, where he has her tell her story to all in attendance. He then banishes his wife, and gives his niece any man she wishes to marry.

This story has several of the common motifs of fairytales. First, the number seven plays an important role in many fairytales, such as seven dwarves in "Snow White" and

the number of baby goats in "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids." In Basile's story, it is the age at which Lisa will perish. This is significant psychologically as the age of seven is when a child enters the latency period of development. During the latency period, according to Freud, nothing of particular importance happens developmentally. This period lasts from age seven until puberty, which, in the story, would be about the time the Baron's wife finds Lisa and pulls her from the casket. (This awakening of Lisa from her death-like sleep could be paralleled to the awakening of sexuality at puberty. Before this time Lisa is locked away in a remote room of the palace, much as prepubescent children's sexuality is locked away in their unconscious.)

Another motif seen in this story is the number three. It is three days from the time Lilla swallows the leaf until she knows she is pregnant. There are also three main figures throughout most of the story. In the beginning, the three characters are Lilla, the Baron, and Lisa. Lilla dies, but is then replaced by the Baron's wife. There are those who feel that the number three is important in fairytales as it represents the Holy Trinity. Bettelheim (1976), as mentioned earlier, sees it as often referring to the id, ego, and superego, the three components of the unconscious.

Both of these may be somewhat applicable to this tale. The three days between the swallowing of the leaf and the realization of the pregnancy may represent something along the lines of the Holy Trinity. I suggest this because the immaculate conception in this story is reminiscent of the Virgin Mary becoming pregnant with the Christ child. Lisa's dishonest reason for swallowing the leaf, however, is not exactly fit into the idea of holiness.

The three components of the unconscious also seem to fit in relation to the three characters. Though I do not really feel the Baron is the superego, I do see Lisa as a young child's developing ego and the Baron's wife as the id. The Baron's wife is violent, angry, and jealous, tells lies, and breaks rules - all of which could easily represent id impulses. Lisa is beaten down much as the ego of a young child is when trying to deal with the struggle between the id's inappropriate negative impulses and the outside world.

This story contains another of Bettelheim's (1976) theories - that of splitting the mother into two parts, one good, one evil. Lilla, the real mother, is very sweet and loving, and actually dies from the heartache of losing her precious daughter. The Baron's wife, as discussed prior, is mean, violent, and generally evil. I cannot help but think that the doll which Lisa to which Lisa relates her life story almost fills the spot normally taken by a fairy godmother in many stories. The doll is not judgmental of the child, and in this way, shows that she cares about the child in much the same way the good mother did.

Though I do not agree with the oedipal concept, this splitting of the mother may represent what Bettelheim (1976) suggests about oedipal imagery in fairytales. The Baron is not Lisa's actual father, but he is definitely the father-figure in the story. When his wife (the stepmother-figure) finds Lisa locked away in a room, she feels that her husband has been worshipping this beautiful young lady behind her back. She is very jealous, which is the reason she treats Lisa so cruelly. The fear of being mistreated, abandoned, or even killed by the same-sex parent is a major part of the oedipal stage of development resulting from the wish to be with the opposite-sex parent. The child assumes that the same-sex parent sees him as a threat to the relationship of the parents, and will therefore want to be rid of him.

This story does not end with Lisa marrying the Baron because fairytales tend to discourage incest. The Baron does, however, rescue Lisa from his evil wife, banish her, and then gives Lisa any husband she may choose. He does not become Lisa's husband, but she does win him away from his wife.

I feel the major challenge of childhood this story could help a child deal with is the oedipal stage of development. This fairytale, however, is not very well known. This may be due to the violent nature of the tale (the Baron's wife beats Lisa until she is bloody several times in the story), and, as mention previously, many parents wish to shield their children from such "bad" things. This tale, in my opinion, should be made more readily available because it could help children deal with some of their oedipal feelings (if such things do exist). It could also teach children that just because their mother can be mean sometimes does not make her all bad.

Conclusion

Fairytales are important as tools as well as entertainment. They can be used for anything from teaching children problem solving to counseling battered women and prisoners. The psychological content of fairytales can help young children deal with fears, feelings, and impulses they may have no other way of working through. I am sure the psychological community, as well as feminists, educators, and literary critics, will continue to use fairytales and investigate their meaning for years to come.

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with a degree of fascination that has facilitated its widespread circulation and that has allowed it to take hold in our culture.

GIAMBATTISTA BASILE

The Young Slave†

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There was once a Baron of Selvascura who had an unmarried sister. This sister used to go and play in a garden with other girls her own age. One day they found a lovely rose in full bloom, so they made a compact that whoever jumped clean over it without touching a single leaf, should win something. But although many of the girls jumped leapfrog over it, they all hit it, and not one of them jumped clean over. But when the turn came to Lilla, the Baron's sister, she stood back a little and took such a run at it that she jumped right over to the other side of the rose. Nevertheless, one leaf fell, but she was so quick and ready that she picked it up from the ground without anyone noticing and swallowed it, thereby winning the prize.

Not less than three days later, Lilla felt herself to be pregnant, and nearly died of grief, for she knew that she had done nothing compromising or dishonest, and could not understand how it was possible for her belly to have swollen. She ran at once to some fairies who were her friends, and when they heard her story, they told her not to worry, for the cause of it all was the rose-leaf she had swallowed.

When Lilla understood this, she took precautions to conceal her condition as much as possible, and when the hour of her deliverance came, she gave birth in hiding to a lovely little girl whom she named Lisa. She sent her to the fairies and they each gave her some charm, but the last one slipped and twisted her foot so badly as she was running to see the child, that in her acute pain she hurled a curse at her, to the effect that when she was seven years old, her mother, whilst combing out her hair, would leave the comb in her tresses, stuck into the head, and from this the child would perish.

At the end of seven years the disaster occurred, and the despairing mother, lamenting bitterly, encased the body in seven caskets of crystal, one within the other, and placed her in a distant room of the palace, keeping the key in her pocket. However, after some time her grief brought her to her grave. When she felt the end to be near, she called her brother and said to him, "My brother, I feel death's hook dragging me away inch by inch. I leave you all my belongings for you to have

† Giambattista Basile, "The Young Slave," in *The Pentamerone*, trans. Benedetto Croce (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1932). Reprinted by permission.

and dispose of as you like; but you must promise me never to open the last room in this house, and always keep the key safely in the casket." The brother, who loved her above all things, gave her his word; at the same moment she breathed, "Adieu, for the beans are ripe."

At the end of some years, this lord (who had in the meantime taken a wife) was invited to a hunting-party. He recommended the care of the house to his wife, and begged her above all not to open the room, the key of which he kept in the casket. However, as soon as he had turned his back, she began to feel suspicious, and impelled by jealousy and consumed by curiosity, which is woman's first attribute, took the key and went to open the room. There she saw the young girl, clearly visible through the crystal caskets, so she opened them one by one and found that she seemed to be asleep. Lisa had grown like any other woman, and the caskets had lengthened with her, keeping pace as she grew.

When she beheld this lovely creature, the jealous woman at once thought, "By my life, this is a fine thing! Keys at one's girdle, yet nature makes horns![1] No wonder he never let anyone open the door and see the Mahomet[2] that he worshipped inside the caskets!" Saying this, she seized the girl by the hair, dragged her out, and in so doing caused the comb to drop out, so that the sleeping Lisa awoke, calling out, "Mother, mother!"

"I'll give you mother, and father too!" cried the Baroness, who was as bitter as a slave, as angry as a bitch with a litter of pups, and as venomous as a snake. She straightaway cut off the girl's hair and thrashed her with the tresses, dressed her in rags, and every day heaped blows on her head and bruises on her face, blackening her eyes and making her mouth look as if she had eaten raw pigeons.[3]

When her husband came back from his hunting-party and saw this girl being so hardly used, he asked who she was. His wife answered that she was a slave sent her by her aunt, only fit for the rope's end, and that one had to be forever beating her.

Now it happened one day, when the Baron had occasion to go to a fair, that he asked everyone in the house, including even the cats, what they would like him to buy for them, and when they had all chosen, one one thing and one another, he turned at last to the slave. But his wife flew into a rage and acted unbecomingly to a Christian, saying, "That's right, class her with all the others, this thick-lipped slave, let everyone be brought down to the same level and all use the urinal.[4] Don't pay so much attention to a worthless bitch, let her go to the devil." But the Baron who was kind and courteous insisted that the

1. The husband or wife is cuckolded.
2. The body of Mahomet was rumored to have been preserved in a coffin suspended between heaven and earth. The Baron, it is implied, has been worshipping a false god.
3. Dripping with blood.
4. All have the same privileges (reflects a time in which using the urinal was considered a luxury).

slave should also ask for something. And she said to him, "I want nothing but a doll, a knife and a pumice-stone; and if you forget them, may you never be able to cross the first river that you come to on your journey!"

The Baron bought all the other things, but forgot just those for which his niece had asked him; so when he came to a river that carried down stones and trees to the shore to lay foundations of fears and raise walls of wonder, he found it impossible to ford it. Then he remembered the spell put on him by the slave, and turned back and bought the three articles in question. When he arrived home he gave out to each one the thing for which they had asked.

When Lisa had what she wanted, she went into the kitchen, and, putting the doll in front of her, began to weep and lament and recount all the story of her troubles to that bundle of cloth just as if it had been a real person. When it did not reply, she took the knife and sharpened it on the pumice-stone and said, "Mind, if you don't answer me, I will dig this into you, and that will put an end to the game!" And the doll, swelling up like a reed when it has been blown into, answered at last, "All right, I have understood you! I'm not deaf!"

This music had already gone on for a couple of days, when the Baron, who had a little room on the other side of the kitchen, chanced to hear this song, and putting his eye to the keyhole, saw Lisa telling the doll all about her mother's jump over the rose-leaf, how she swallowed it, her own birth, the spell, the curse of the last fairy, the comb left in her hair, her death, how she was shut into the seven caskets and placed in that room, her mother's death, the key entrusted to the brother, his departure for the hunt, the jealousy of his wife, how she opened the room against her husband's commands, how she cut off her hair and treated her like a slave, and the many, many torments she had inflicted on her. And all the while she wept and said, "Answer me, dolly, or I will kill myself with this knife." And sharpening it on the pumice-stone, she would have plunged it into herself had not the Baron kicked down the door and snatched the knife out of her hand.

He made her tell him the story again at greater length, and then he embraced his niece and took her away from that house, and left her in charge of one of his relations in order that she should get better, for the hard usage inflicted on her by that heart of a Medea[5] had made her quite thin and pale. After several months, when she had become as beautiful as a goddess, the Baron brought her home and told everyone that she was his niece. He ordered a great banquet, and when the viands had been cleared away, he asked Lisa to tell the story of the hardships she had undergone and of the cruelty of his wife—a tale which made all the guests weep. Then he drove his wife away, sending

5. Princess and sorceress of Colchis who helped Jason obtain the Golden Fleece and murdered her two sons when she was betrayed.

her back to her parents, and gave his niece a handsome husband of her own choice. Thus Lisa testified that

Heaven rains favors on us when we least expect it.